

BARRINGTON WATSON PROPERTY AD-HOC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

Regular Meeting

7:00 p.m. Monday, November 15, 2021

Hybrid – In Person and Zoom Remote Meeting, 261 Middle Highway, Barrington, RI 02806

1. Call to Order and Confirm Quorum

Chair Hervey called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

In attendance: Matt Amaral, David Beal, Kathleen Berard, Annelise Conway, Carla DeStefano, Kelly Chinnners Reiss, Phil Hervey (Chair), Ted Myatt, Erin Paquette, Thomas Peck, Roni Phipps, and Fletch Thomson

Absent: Christopher Brady (Housing Board of Trustees Alternate), Lynne Carter (Resilience and Energy Committee Alternate); Susan McCalmont (observed via Zoom)

Also in attendance: Mike Ursillo, Town Solicitor; James Cunha, Town Manager; Isabelle Gillibrand, Clerk to the Watson Ad-Hoc Committee

2. Project Background and Role of Committee

Chair Hervey reviewed the background of the project with the Committee and consultant team, explaining that the property was purchased with financing approved by voters in a close vote at the 2021 Financial Town Meeting. He described the role of the Committee in informing decisions regarding the future development of the property.

3. Committee Member Introductions

Each of the Committee members introduced themselves, including the name of the board or Committee on which they serve, as applicable, and what they looked forward as a member of the Ad-Hoc Committee.

4. Introduce Consultant Team and Roles

The consultant team introduced themselves and their backgrounds:

- Todd Poole, 4ward Planning
- Keelia Kentor, consulting planner
- Eric Army, Signal Works Architecture

Army presented PowerPoint slides including information about the consultant team, and the firms' missions, photos of the existing property conditions, and project goals.

5. Overview of Schedule and Deliverables

Army reviewed the schedule of deliverables, including the timeline for a market feasibility study during the discovery period that will continue through January. He described the “design funnel” portion of the project that will take place mid-January through March.

Chair Hervey asked about the feasibility of preserving the existing building, which Army noted will be considered during discovery in terms of preservation and adaptive re-use. The Committee asked Army questions about when the structural building assessment will take place.

Army reviewed the timeline of deliverables, including a proposed site plan, conceptual plans, a financial feasibility study, and a traffic impact letter.

The Committee discussed the Town’s goals, including whether the intent is to make a profit or breakeven. The discussion also included questions about zoning changes and Comprehensive Plan amendments, the historic nature of the building, and comparisons of this project with the former Zion Bible Institute property on Middle Highway.

6. Market Analysis Kickoff

Poole explained 4ward Planning’s role in the planning process in identifying uses that are market receptive. He said his understanding is senior housing is a significant consideration for this project. He noted his analysis will help the Town come up with different ways the property can be used as senior housing, such as age-restricted and/or affordable, and how portions of the property may also be used for other elements, such as recreation/public space.

In response to a question from a Committee member, Poole explained how the consultant team will be looking at senior housing as well as other potential uses, such as other residential unit types, some types of commercial, co-working space.

David Butera, 275 Nayatt Road, asked how the development will affect the surrounding residential area. Chair Hervey noted that was more of a design question, adding that the Committee will be sensitive to the neighbors. He said McMahon Associates is a subconsultant that will evaluate traffic impacts.

MOTION: Chair Hervey made a motion to add to agenda items, including 8) Next Steps, and 9) Adjourn. Member Peck seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

7. Visioning Session

Kentor thanked the Committee for completing a survey she created and the Town distributed prior to the meeting to gather initial thoughts and ideas for the project. She noted recurring themes from the survey input, including affordable senior housing, preserving and creating open space, and creating a community recreation space. She then reviewed the common concerns, including identifying and clarifying the town’s role in the project, the impact to the environment, and the community needs versus the financial impact. Kentor read through the results of the survey, which she placed under six major categories, including critical hot-button issues, strengths, challenges, opportunities, goals, and success factors. Kentor commented how one of the results she found

interesting was that adaptive reuse was not as popular as she expected. Member DeStefano noted how there were strong feelings about the Town's acquisition of the property at the 2021 Financial Town Meeting.

Mary Grenier, 10 Watson Ave., said the physical building itself is not attractive, but it was the memories within the monastery to which residents felt an emotional attachment. She also noted the hesitation she and what she believed other residents felt with the development of this property given the slow-moving nature of the development at the Zion property. Grenier asked to clarify the preservation piece of the vote at the Financial Town Meeting, which she said requires the building to be preserved. The Committee discussion included comments on past use of the building, including hosting religious services, baptisms, funerals, and other events. Town Manager Cunha said that most of the furnishings and decorative elements in the chapel have been removed, but there are some original features remaining, including several stained-glass panels.

Kentor invited the Committee to brainstorm ideas to add to the six categories, including adding the opportunity to get input from the Cemetery Commission to review the site as there were once graves there, reducing energy use for the new project, increasing access to public open space, and looking at larger-scale trends, such as looking at what types of developments are happening not only regionally but throughout the country.

Samuel Chase, 95 Nayatt Road, asked about affordable housing as a potential component of the project. Chair Hervey said affordable housing will be a requirement for any residential development that occurs at that property, as the Town has a 20% mandatory inclusionary zoning requirement.

The Committee continued discussion on the Town's role with the project, and how this initiative is to prevent a situation like the Zion property and allow the Town and its residents to have a say of what goes there.

Butera asked further questions about the design and if a developer would be bound to certain plans. Army and Poole noted that the process will result in amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, which would include some prescriptive requirements. They said this should be written to provide some flexibility to allow innovative ideas and consideration of additional opportunities.

Kentor returned to the six categories of survey responses. Committee discussion included a question of whether the monastery building was constructed of Barrington brick, and if that would be something that could be incorporated into the project; a recognition that beach access as an ongoing challenge; a comment that the project could support public art as part of the overall development; and the potential for creating a structured space for teens all as potential ideas and opportunities.

Diane Lipscombe, 6 Watson Ave., commented on the opportunity for this development to improve the aesthetics of the building, and was pleased to hear there would be a traffic impact report.

Elizabeth Grieser, 42 Watson Avenue, explained how the neighborhood is quiet and residential in character. She expressed concern of making the property commercial use or denser. She asked the Committee to take into account input of the residents in the neighborhood.

Butera commented about adding incentives for a future developer.

Kentor then led the Committee and those in attendance through a dot-polling activity. The group recessed to allow everyone to go up with ten sticky dots that can be used to place next to the description of items from the six categories. Kentor said the results would be compiled for use heading into the December 15th Committee meeting.

The Committee then held a brainstorming session to identify who they felt were stakeholders, including abutters, organizations in Barrington and the surrounding area, and other Town public bodies, which will help the consultant team figure out who should be reached out to during the public outreach portion of their study throughout the next couple of Committee meetings.

8. Next Steps

Kentor noted that the next step will be a public engagement session on December 15th. The Committee and Kentor discussed the meeting requirements of the Rhode Island Open Meetings Act, and the best way to both meet those regulars and receive the most amount of public input possible. Kentor discussed the potential for focus groups as part of this as well. The Committee discussed having the option for residents to have outlets to choose from regarding participation and creating a webpage on the Town's website dedicated to this project.

After the public engagement session, January will include a "first draft" of findings, a second meeting to receive input and feedback, and then a third meeting of a joint Committee meeting to be determined.

9. Adjourn

MOTION: Member DeStefano made a motion to adjourn at 9:00 p.m., and the meeting was adjourned (7-0).